Title  Editor’s Notebook

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Abstract  Summary of current issue.
One of the great weaknesses of scholarship is the tendency researchers and authors have to uncritically repeat each other, or to accept as a demonstrated “fact” an argument based on several unproven assumptions and various pieces of evidence that could, in reality, be interpreted a number of different ways. It is a tendency that often manifests itself in the well-known phrase, “As _______ has shown,” followed by twenty pages of an argument whose validity in large part rests not on the current author’s work, but on the cited authority’s earlier thesis. Depending on the earlier authority’s own reputation and the frequency with which other scholars cite his or her work, sooner or later that argument—complete with its assumptions and even errors—enters the realm (in many people’s minds) of established “fact,” there to remain until someone else takes the time to evaluate the original argument, point out its ambiguities, and offer alternative explanations. While a problem to one degree or another in every field of study, this mutation of argument into fact seems especially prevalent in LDS scholarship, where everything from the languages and cultures of the ancient Near East to the latest general conference addresses are part of the field, and the laborers are relatively few.

Each of the articles in this issue of the Journal evaluates, in one way or another, earlier interpretations and explanations of a variety of topics and offers new ways of looking at them. In his incongruous-sounding “Nephi and Goliath,” Ben McGuire directs our attention away from the Exodus motif that so many authors have noted in 1 Nephi and makes a good case for the idea that Nephi composed at least part of his first book—especially those parts relating to the slaying of Laban—with one eye on the story of David and Goliath. Gaye Strathearn offers a new way of understanding some of the Isaiah passages in the Book of Mormon, especially those cited by the Savior himself during his visit to the Nephites in Bountiful. Similarly, Duane Boyce evaluates the popular notion that the Ammonites, in their refusal to take up arms against their enemies even in the face of certain death, provide readers of the Book of Mormon with a textbook example of “pacifism.” Carefully tracing the origins of these Lamanite converts, and evaluating their own actions and words, Boyce concludes that whatever principles the Ammonites do serve as examples of, pacifism, as the term is generally understood today, is not one of them.

For those with a penchant for Semitic languages, Paul Hoskisson addresses the idea that the –ihah ending on several Book of Mormon names is a form of the theophoric –iah ending in Hebrew names. Hoskisson rejects that idea for several reasons and at the same time reminds us how carefully we must evaluate apparent similarities before we can legitimately claim a connection between them. Terry Ball sounds a similar caution in his letter to the editor about the location of Bountiful, and it appears that both issues—Book of Mormon names and Nephi’s land of “much fruit and . . . wild honey” will continue to be hot topics for some time to come.

“Re-evaluation,” then, is a possible unifying theme of the articles of this issue of the Journal. They are only a sampling of the types of papers that still need to be written on a variety of topics, not only in Book of Mormon studies but in other areas of LDS scripture and history as well. Far from providing final answers, these articles open up new possibilities for others, in turn, to evaluate and test as part of the ongoing process of coming to understand all that the scriptures of the Restoration have to offer.